

Happy in My Skin

Simon Bell Christian Education 2006

"Much of what we pass off as youth ministry is strongly biased for dealing with a White, male, middle-class context." This strident challenge pulses through the pages of this accessible but well-informed book and forces this reader to observe that if that's the case with youth ministry, then it's certainly true for other aspects of church life. Not only that, but the writers also challenge common misunderstandings of what 'contextual theology' may or may not be. They adopt a contextual methodology which is profoundly biblical but they not only ask, 'what does the gospel say to contemporary society?' but reflect on their Minority Ethnic experience alongside Biblical insight so that the resultant mix focuses what God is saying not only to youth work, but to the church at large. From this incarnation of God's Black and Minority Ethnic people come ideas for good practice and projects from which we all could learn. There's also good demographic analysis here, deeply moving stories and theological challenges which a White, middle class church won't want to hear – but must. Our recent ideas about 'new ways of being church' are largely biased towards our consumerist Western culture – but these authors want to know if what is Western is automatically to be assumed Christian!

A series of riveting essays by Simon Bell (the editor could have been a little more alert to some resulting repetition) is followed by chapters from practitioners representing the extreme diversity of Black and Minority Ethnic UK youngsters (the new diverse Britain for which the Church must make ready). Readers will not agree with all the theological styles represented here, but helpfully, they are expressed very clearly and robustly. The heavy urban context is predominant, with insights into British Asian, Black and Korean lives but experience of Travellers and the Rural is here too.

The authors remind us that when we engage with a young Black person, indeed any young person, we must throw away our stereotypes and our fears, and remember that Christianity is not only a religion for old White people but is vibrant with an inclusive Energy which offers salvation for us all.

+ *Laurie Green*